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SUBJECT: CZECH PM APPOINTS NEW HEALTH MINISTER

1. (U) Prime Minister Jiri Paroubek today named David Rath, currently President of the Czech Medical Chamber, to replace Milada Emmerova as Minister of Health. With less than eight months before the next general election, the move is being seen as an interim appointment. One of Rath's main tasks will be to reconcile doctors and the nation's main insurance company, who have been publicly feuding. Rath, who had been a member of the opposition Civic Democrats (ODS) 91-94, is currently unaffiliated and becomes the sixth non-party member in Paroubek's cabinet. Critics say he was chosen more for his media skills than his political ideology, since Emmerova had become a public liability during the doctors - vs- insurance company dispute.

2. (SBU) Unlike some members of Paroubek's Social Democrats, Rath is not pathologically opposed to the introduction of patient fees, a move which many reformists believe is critical to any effort at health care reform. Rath is a much greater supporter of doctors in state hospitals than those in private practice. Rath has also made it known that he would cut costs by promoting greater use of generic drugs, a move pharmaceuticals, particularly those producing innnovate medications, see as threatening. Some pharmaceuticals fear that Rath will continue or even increase the trend of lowering reimbursement levels towards those offered for generic drugs.

3. (U) President Klaus has initially refused to approve of the nomination, since Rath has not yet stepped down from the Medical Chamber.
CABANISS